
When the Contracting Parties to GATT open their twenty-fourth session tomorrow, 9 November, they will be meeting very shortly after the twentieth anniversary of the signing of the GATT.

The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade was signed by the representatives of twenty-three countries at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on 30 October 1947. From this initial figure of twenty-three, the GATT membership has grown to seventy-seven; in addition, one other country has completed negotiations for accession and eight newly-independent countries are applying the GATT de facto while deciding upon the future lines of their commercial policies.

During the last three days (22-24 November) of the twenty-fourth session, the work of GATT over the past twenty years will be reviewed and consideration given to its future programme. It is expected that, for this discussion, governments will be represented at a high level, and that Ministers from a large number of developed and developing countries will be present.

The GATT filled the gap resulting from the failure of the proposed International Trade Organization to come into being in the immediate post-war years. It became the international forum for multilateral consultation and negotiation on trade problems. Its provisions and principles - which aim essentially at the progressive liberalization of trade on a multilateral, non-discriminatory basis - have governed the conduct of the trade and commercial relations of countries accounting for some four-fifths of international trade.

A major review of GATT was undertaken in 1954/55. Important among the modifications made were those giving the developing countries more flexibility in the use of the tariff and other measures to promote their economic development.

1 Seventy-four countries have acceded fully and three provisionally.
There have been five GATT meetings of Trade Ministers over the past ten years: in 1957, 1958, 1961, 1963 and 1964. The first two meetings prepared and inaugurated the Programme for the Expansion of International Trade which has broadly been the basis for much of GATT's activity over the past decade in the field of tariff reduction, trade in agricultural products, and the trade problems of the developing countries. The last two meetings set in motion the Kennedy Round of trade negotiations.

In the two decades of GATT's existence, world trade has experienced a great expansion: 1966 was the eighth successive year of substantial and uninterrupted expansion and one in which, for the first time, world exports exceeded $200 billion. The work of GATT and, in particular, the multilateral tariff and trade negotiations that have been carried out under its auspices, have made a major contribution to this expansion.

There have been six GATT multilateral negotiating conferences. These have brought about a very substantial reduction of tariffs and, through the GATT process of "binding" negotiated tariff levels against increase, have ensured an important degree of tariff stability. The location of the GATT negotiating conferences, and estimates of the value of export trade in the products on which concessions were granted at these conferences, are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Value (at pre-war prices)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>Geneva</td>
<td>$10,000 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1949</td>
<td>Annecy</td>
<td>Not available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950/51</td>
<td>Torquay</td>
<td>Not available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956</td>
<td>Geneva</td>
<td>$2,500 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960/61</td>
<td>Geneva</td>
<td>$4,900 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964/67</td>
<td>Geneva</td>
<td>$40,000 million</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The 1964/67 conference - the Kennedy Round - was by far the most ambitious and comprehensive commercial negotiation ever undertaken. Its substantial results were summarized in Press Releases GATT/992 and 995.

In line with its objective of trying to secure the freest possible movement of goods among the nations of the world, GATT has also maintained constant pressure against other barriers to trade. In particular, there has been a substantial and widespread reduction in the use of import restrictions on industrial goods that cannot be justified on balance-of-payments grounds.

There is a GATT Declaration on subsidies that has the effect of prohibiting the use of export subsidies on industrial products. This Declaration entered into force in November 1962, when it had been accepted by fourteen industrialized countries.

During the Kennedy Round, a code relating to the administration of national anti-dumping legislation was negotiated; this supplements the relevant GATT provisions on this subject.
While GATT's principal effort is, of course, in the commercial policy field it has also paid attention to administrative barriers to trade. In 1953, for example, it drew up the International Convention to Facilitate the Importation of Samples and Advertising Material. It has also been active in securing, among other things, reductions in consular formalities.

The Long-Term Arrangement on Cotton Textiles was negotiated under the auspices of GATT. It came into force on 1 October 1962 for a period of five years; thirty countries, including non-GATT countries, have subscribed to it. On 1 October 1967, a Protocol providing for the extension of the Arrangement for a further period of three years came into effect.

The trade problems of the developing countries have taken up an increasing share of GATT's work and attention. This is reflected in the various Ministerial conclusions, declarations and resolutions that have been adopted, in the work of Committee III and the Action Committee, in the attention paid to these problems in the Kennedy Round and, finally, in the incorporation of the new Part IV on Trade and Development in GATT and the establishment of the Trade and Development Committee to supervise its application. There are now some forty developing countries Members of GATT.

In May 1964, the GATT International Trade Centre came into operation to assist developing countries in the promotion of their exports. At their twenty-fourth session, the contracting parties will have before them a proposal for the joint operation of an International Trade Centre by GATT and UNCTAD which would incorporate the existing GATT Centre.

The above gives an indication of some of GATT's activities. For information and reference purposes a Short Chronology of GATT's history, which also contains more detailed information on such matters as, for example, tariff and trade negotiations, is being issued separately as Press Release GATT/1008.